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AUTHOR Euster, Joanne R.
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ABSTRACT

Based on data from a 1979 survey of ARL member libraries, this study by the Office of Management Studies analyzes the responses of selected libraries which had provided internal studies or planning documents on the subject of internal communication and notes the extent of resulting changes in procedures. The studies yielded information on staff communication concerns, especially with respect to personnel development, job effectiveness, and the systematization of communication methods and procedures. Changes in organizational communication patterns resulting from recommendations implemented in the libraries which conducted internal studies centered on these same areas. Though most of the libraries took some action in each area, management and organizational factors affected the success of implementation. Easily implemented recommendations dealt with personnel and job effectiveness issues, while the difficult to implement recommendations were those related to the standardization or centralization of communication functions. Study of the decisions surrounding the adoption of AACR2 revealed that clear management expectations provide a basis for communication between individual service units and establish a central responsibility for the communication of plans and decisions. Suggestions for improving organizational communications in academic libraries are appended. (JL)

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Changing Patterns in Internal Communication in Large Academic Libraries

Occasional Paper Number 6
July 1981
by Joanne R. Euster

Office of Management Studies
Association of Research Libraries
Washington, D.C.

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Joanne R. Euster is Director of the Library at San Francisco State University.

Office of Management Studies
Association of Research Libraries
1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20036

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CHANGING PATTERNS IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN LARGE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

by Joanne R. Euster

ABSTRACT

This publication analyzes the ways in which some Association of Research Library (ARL) members have studied their own internal communication needs, formulated recommendations for change, and implemented those recommendations. The paper seeks to describe and categorize what communication devices and policies libraries actually utilize, and to provide some measure of insight into the ways in which communication concerns and purposes relate to organizational development, as well as to the interests of library management. An appendix offers library managers suggestions for improving and maintaining internal communication.

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"The American people can do anything if you tell them why, but you must tell them."

-- Bernard Baruch

BACKGROUND

Organizational communication and decision-making methods constitute a substantial body of management literature. Increasingly, library literature focuses on the same issues, in part to draw library management closer to the general practice of management in all kinds of organizations, and in part to cope with the increasing complexity of library functions and systems. However, only a small body of literature on specifically library internal communication and decision-making theory and practice has emerged to this time.

Intra-organizational communication takes several forms. Decisions, plans, day-to-day operational details, and matters pertaining to working conditions must be communicated from management to staff. Management, in turn, requires feedback on how decisions are implemented, how well the organization is doing its job, and what is needed to do the job. It also looks for a flow of ideas, suggestions, concerns and needs from staff. Divisions and departments need what is called a lateral flow or exchange of information in order to understand their roles in the overall organization, to manage their own coordination, and to make decisions and plans which cross departmental and divisional lines.

Three elements peculiar to libraries, as well as to certain other highly professionalized organizations, increase the pressure for effective and accurate communication. First, library staffs are composed to a high degree of independent professionals, many of whom see themselves as primarlily devoted to their craft and with only secondary loyalty to a given library or university. This distinction applies to many support staff (here the term is used to describe the entire spectrum of non-librarians at whatever rank) as well, who consider themselves to be career library workers, and many of whom have, and expect to have, substantially longer tenure in the institution than the mobile administrators under whom they work. The tension, elaborated by Etzioni [1], among others, between the goals and concerns of professionals and the needs of the administrative hierarchy can be eased and held in balance by a trustworthy system of communication.

Second, most large libraries are decentralized organizations, in that the central administration is often physically removed from branches, departmental libraries or extension centers. The need or desire to communicate is thus complicated by physical distance and limited personal contact, much as in business and industry.

Third, today's libraries are rapidly changing organizations. They are adopting advanced technology, which requires staff training and retraining, shifts in expenditures and service patterns and priorities, and personnel shifts. They are responding to societal and governing body pressures, as institutions supported by larger public and private agencies, to be fiscally accountable, to demonstrate their effectiveness and worth, and, in many cases, to simultaneously reduce real-dollar expenditures. They are increasingly subject to pressure from work groups, as a result of collective bargaining and because of raised expectations of staff that work will be financially rewarding, interesting, and a valued contribution to society. Effective communication is a requirement for implementing change; it is also a means. Where reliable systems of communication already exist and the trust level between management and staff is high, change takes place more easily.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES AND POLICIES

The Office of Management Studies surveyed ARL libraries' policies and practices regarding internal communication in 1979, and published the results in two SPEC kits.[2] The present study sought to enlarge upon the responses of selected libraries which had provided internal studies or planning documents on the subject of internal communication, and to note the extent of resulting changes in procedures.

Current communication practices, as reported in the 1979 SPEC survey, can be summarized briefly. Among the 75 responding libraries, regular newsletters and announcement sheets (54), memos (61), and bulletin boards (54) were the most frequently indicated means of communcation from management to staff. Communication from staff to management came most frequently through direct communication with the immediate supervisor (58) and by means of membership on committees, task forces or other staff groups (58). However, management also relied on verbal announcements at meetings (48), and individual staff members sent their own communications to library management nearly as frequently (47).

These responses are consistent with at least one other study of communications media employed by 35 large corporations, in which employee periodicals, bulletin boards, and personal contacts with supervisors were the three methods universally utilized.[3]

Among the 58 respondents answering the question "Has the library developed written policies, procedures, guidelines, or other statements that describe or discuss communications channels/processes within the library?", one-third (19) responded in the affirmative, 39 negatively; the remaining 17 of the 75 total survey respondents did not answer the question. If it is assumed that no answer indicated that no such written statement existed, 25% of the responding libraries had such documents.

In order to better understand the effect of these formal statements on library communication practices, seven libraries[4] which had provided planning documents, self-studies, or task force recommendations on staff and internal communication were selected for telephone interviews. The libraries were selected

in such a way as to provide a limited cross section of geographic locations, size, and public-private governance mix. The purpose of the interviews was to learn (1) to what degree recommendations from the studies had been implemented, and (2) what effect implementation, non-implementation, or the process of self-study itself had had on the library. Finally, discussion of implementation of AACR 2 and the decision on the fate of the catalog served as a current topic to illustrate each library's communication and decision process.

STAFF COMMUNICATION CONCERNS

For purposes of this paper, recommendations from the reports were loosely grouped into five categories representing the major internal communication concerns expressed by the study teams. The first three categories emphasize goals and purposes of communication; the last two are primarily concerned with mechanics and methodology.

- Personnel and staff development needs were related to communication in several reports. The need for clearer communication of working conditions and changes in conditions was emphasized. In addition, within the broader concern for staff development in general, the need for development of staff skills to meet their own communication responsibilities was mentioned by several study teams. This is noteworthy, inasmuch as the preponderance of recommendations dealt with either the responsibilities of management to communicate to staff, or with specific actions which should be taken by management, rather than by staff, to respond to staff communication concerns, regardless of the direction of communication under discussion.

- Job effectiveness factors comprise a category of information flow which allows employees to perform their jobs effectively, and without which performance is hampered. These factors can be considered a subset of Frederick Herzberg's "hygienic factors," which are defined as those necessary for performance, but which do not substantially increase morale or output. 5

- Staff motivation as a result of increased information is a subject of some controversy. The dividing line between what staff members need to know, as defined under job effectiveness, and what staff want to know is not at all clear, particularly in complex organizations which rely heavily on people as their principal resource. Nevertheless, attention to what Herzberg has called "motivational factors" is generally expected to improve staff morale and to affect productivity.

- The role of meetings and committees in the communication and decision-making process is probably most closely linked to the motivational factors discussed above. Committee activity is perceived as a route by which desired information can be shared; at the same time, the demand for clarity of responsibility and reporting suggests that the sharing is expected to be meaningful. The meeting and committees structure is the only category which relates closely to lateral communication between departments or divisions.

- Systematic communication procedures are seen as a guarantee that information will be shared equally, appropriately, and in a timely manner. The locus of responsibility for creation and operation of communication systems is almost uniformly expected to reside with top management.

CONCERNS OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

GOALS/PURPOSES

Personnel and Staff Development

- Job descriptions
- Staff orientation
- Posting and publicizing job and staff development opportunities
- Employment information: schedules, benefits, salaries, procedures
- Training in communication skills, committee and meeting skills
- Development of staff members' awareness of their responsibility for meeting some part of their own communication needs

Job Effectiveness

- Job descriptions, duties, role in the organization
- Speed and timeliness of information
- Distribution of policies and procedures, handbooks
- Clear communication of decisions
- Staff orientation
- Regular budget information
- Periodic reports from administration, unit managers, and committees

Staff Motivation

- Knowledge of organizational chart, roles in the organization
- Understanding and dissemination of goals and mission statement
- Visits from administration to staff; informal contacts
- Visibility of administration
- Staff directories and telephone numbers
- Speed and timeliness of dissemination of information
- Sharing knowledge of work functions
- Involvement in planning processes and policy development
- Distribution of minutes of meetings and committees
- Ability to find out; central reading files; bulletin boards
- Climate of trust, openness, mutual respect
- Experimentation with new methods of communication

MECHANICS/METHODOLOGY

Role of Meetings and Committees

- Involvement of staff in committees; stated recognition of the value committee participation as a professional responsibility
- Communication of recommendations and decisions to staff; distribution of minutes
- Clear role and function of committees
- Periodic reports from committees; re-evaluation of role and value of standing committees
- Full staff meetings
- Regular department or unit meetings

Systematization of Communication

- Creation or maintenance of administrative information bulletin or newsletter
- Standardization of formats of written communications
- Maintenance of master calendar
- Evaluation of cost-effectiveness of system
- Central locus for communication responsibility
- Multiple channels of communication
- Regular periodic reports from top management, units and committees
- Organization of communication to match the organization chart
- Regular department or unit meetings, with minutes

These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor parallel. Rather, they are grouped to demonstrate patterns of concern with internal communication issues. Within individual reports, the variety of recommendations is broad, responding to specific local conditions and problems. Nevertheless, there is considerable overlap. The issues cited fall into two groups. Concerns such as "lack of speed and timeliness of information" express a perceived problem. Other issues, for example "regular department or unit meetings", are proposed solutions to other communication problems.

The majority of the recommendations for systematizing communication processes emphasize top-down, or management-to-employee communication, and stress the responsibility of management to devise and operate the communication system. Bottom-up, or employee-to-management communication is dealt with in recommendations for staff training in communication skills, and issues dealing with clarification of the role of committees related to lateral or intra-departmental communication. It should be emphasized, however, that no aspect of internal communication can be considered in isolation, and each direction of information flow affects all the others.

CHANGES IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION: RECOMMENDATIONS IMPLEMENTED

To study the effects of these studies and recommendations on communication procedures within the library, four groups of questions were asked:*

1. To what extent were you able to implement the recommendations of the study?

2. What factors contributed to or inhibited implementation?

3. What have the effects of implementation been? What effect did the study have, in and of itself?

4. How can you tell what the effects have been? What evidence do you have of the effects? Have you been able to measure the effects?

Personnel and Staff Development

Every library which had made recommendations concerning personnel and staff development issues had implemented some aspects of those recommendations; none had implemented them all. Three libraries issued a general handbook to help deal with specific recommendations for job descriptions and information about working conditions, as well as the need for staff orientation. Staff development to create communication awareness and skills was recommended in five cases, but implemented in only two. Duke University's task force listed objectives for staff:

* Two libraries are excluded from most of the implementation analysis. In one case, no recommendations were implemented as a result of the report. In another, recommendations were limited to the staff newsletter and the role of the administrative team.

"To educate and encourage each staff member to be aware of his/her responsibilities in the whole enterprise of communications within the Library...enable each staff member to become a participating and responsible member of the communication network; to provide to Library staff members the appropriate instructions concerning methods of communication, sources of available information and means of access to them."

Response to concerns for training in and recognition of the two-way nature of communication took the direct form of workshops in two libraries; in addition, one library instituted supervisory training to improve communication skills.

Job Effectiveness and Motivation

The distinction between what often are called hygienic factors and motivation is not always clear.* The degree of staff "need to know" is a subject of considerable debate. Perhaps it could be said that management generally underestimates staff's desire to be informed and staff generally overestimates its own need to be informed. However, a number of theorists hypthesize that workers in complex, highly specialized fields are less likely to tolerate what they perceive as attempts to define or structure their work, relying instead on their own expertise and knowledge.[6] Similarly, decentralized organizations such as large library systems require greater autonomy among units and a greater flow of information to function for the good of the entire organization, as opposed to limited self-interest.

At one end of the spectrum, are those staff concerns which are clearly hygienic centered on availability and clear understanding of the libraries' goals, policies, procedures and organization. These concerns, as well as many personnel concerns, were addressed in three libraries by development and distribution of handbooks or manuals such as University of Connecticut's "Manager's Handbook". Concerns over the role of the individual and the unit in the total organization as well as the relationships among units were expressed variously in requests for regularly revised job descriptions and organization charts, staff directories, and for planned sharing activities such as departmental presentations. Three libraries reported implementing programs of regular revision of job descriptions, task analysis projects, job rotation and regularly scheduled presentation on departments' activities and roles.

*Further discussion of hygienic and motivational factors can be found in Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mauser, and Barbara Synderman. The Motivation to Work (2nd ed.: New York: Wiley, 1959.) and in Herzberg's Work and the Nature of Man (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1966.) Briefly, hygienic factors, as defined by Herzberg, are those characteristics of the work environment the absence of which would hamper job performance. These are viewed as potential sources of dissatisfacton, but not as sources of positive work attitudes. Examples are adequate supervision, regular salary and benefits, and appropriate physical working conditions. Motivational factors are those which are closely associated with accomplishment of the work itself, such as challenging assignments or opportunities to learn and grow in the job. Motivators provide employee satisfaction, and the presence of them correlates with high performance.

On the assumption that large libraries are complex, decentralized organizations which rely heavily on specialized technical and professional workers, one would expect an emphasis on what are here called motivational factors, and this is indeed the case. These factors, lumped together, are less requirements for specific kinds of information than a belief in the need for the organization to be open and permeable, and pleas for the knowledge necessary to find information when it is needed. Once again, all libraries responded to the broad category of concerns, and none responded to all. However, the very fact of the existence of a study or recommendations on communication could be expected to, of itself, respond in part to the need by demonstrating management's attention to and interest in the issue.

Numerous motivational recommendations seemed to center on efforts to perceive accountability of top management to staff. At one end of the spectrum, regularity of unit meetings, uniform distribution of minutes, clear communication of decisions and periodic reports from "the administration", departments and committees were recommended. At the other end, the need for greater visibility of administrators, increased informal contacts, and development of "a climate of trust and openness" were expressed as desires rather than specific recommendations. Four libraries had implemented in part the recommendations concerning distrubution of minutes, regular meetings and periodic reports. University of California/Los Angeles reported that visibility of management in its decentralized system is "a goal of the administration," but is made difficult by the same physical circumstances which create the need.

Systems and Methodology of Communication

The two final categories of concern, which deal with methods of implementation, role of meetings and committees, and systematization of communication, are inextricably interwoven into the implementation of recommendations for the flow of communication. Whether specific techniques or devices for implementation were employed is less important than whether the flow of information was improved. Generalizations about systems and mechanics can be made, however, as part of a review of factors that contributed to or inhibited implementation of changes in communication processes.

MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING IMPLEMENTATION

Among the libraries surveyed, three had followed up recommendations with a systematic in-house review of what had or had not been accomplished since the report was written. The conclusion of one director, following distribution to staff of the follow-up report, was, "Much more had been done about (the report) than the staff thought."

A review of those recommendations which had been implemented revealed that while each library had taken some action in each of the five areas of concern, none had implemented all recommendations in each category. This pattern reflects individual library conditions, in that the urgency of any single recommendation, as well as the feasibility of implementing it, depends on largely subjective judgments by the library administration. In addition, because some concerns may be defined as problems, others identify potential solutions and a more sweeping action may be used to respond to the underlying concern while ignoring the proposed solution. This seems to be particularly true of job effectiveness concerns, many of which lend themselves to inclusion in the multipurpose handbooks and manuals developed in three libraries.

Those recommendations which were most easily implemented dealt with personnel issues and job effectiveness concerns, most of which were addressed by employing one or more of the recommendations for systematization of communication. Hands-down winner of the most implementation votes was a regular internal newsletter, usually issued from administrative offices, which was either initiated or improved in six of the seven libraries surveyed. Vanderbilt, as an exception, experimented with a staff-run and edited newsletter, which was later abandoned in favor of a more straight-forward semi-weekly "Announcements from the Director's Office."

Which recommendations were most difficult to implement? Five reports recommended some system of standardization of formats for communications and a central responsibility for information dissemination; nevertheless, no library reported full implementation of these recommendations. Perhaps a clue to the difficulty may be found in the recommendations themselves, which were phrased in such terms as "delineate...clear guidelines for the communication process" (Connecticut) or "flow of downward information shall be organized, consolidated and streamlined at its beginning point..." (UCLA) or "As perceptions about administrative communications differ greatly, there is a need to have an ongoing process for outlining the types and methods of communication..." (Temple). The emphasis on centralized and continuous responsibility could be read to imply the creation of a specific management-to-staff communication coordination position or responsibility, a fiscal commitment many libraries would find difficult to make. In the same vein, the desire for a finely honed and controlled flow of information implies something approaching a selective dissemination of information profile for each employee, a concept which to this time libraries have not seriously considered. As one library concluded, "This may be too ambitious!"

In the interviews, several key factors emerged as crucial to implementing needed changes in communication methods. First and foremost was the effect of organizational change. Second, the leadership role of top management, and the heavy reliance on mid-management to carry out the communication process had a felt, if not measurable, impact on implementation. Third, the presence or absence of a single office with internal communication rsponsibility affected development of new patterns. Finally, the awareness and interest generated by the activity of the study itself affected expectations, which in turn were affected not only by whether or not recommendations were actually implemented, but by the degree to which staff were clearly aware of implementation.

Organizational Change

Almost without exception, the nature of changes in communication processes and the long-range effects of implementation were heavily influenced by organizational change itself. In many cases, the change was in top management, notably the expectation of and arrival of a new director, or the leave of absence and return of a director. In one instance, the construction of a new main library building and the move into it both hindered and facilitated implementation of changes in communication patterns. In another, organizational restructuring affected communication. The advent of collective bargaining in one situation affected communication structures. While the type of change varied, and while the same change was seen as a motivating factor by the library and as an inhibiting factor in another, the single constant affecting communication needs and processing throughout was the continuing presence of organizational change.

Upper and Mid-Management Leadership Role

The frequent mention of the role and expectations of top management and of the turnover in directorships leads to the conclusion that the leadership role of the director is critical in how communication is managed, and in what types of communication changes are implemented. At the same time, the role of middle management and supervisors in the communication process was seen as crucial by the members of upper management who were questioned. Repeatedly the respondents pointed out that although lines and systems of communication were established at the top, "we don't have a good handle on how well the heads pass information on to the units."

Leadership style affects the flow of information and the attention paid to it at all levels of management at least as much as does the existence of procedures and guidelines, which can only serve to insure that the flow of information exists, not that its content is useful or reliable. A climate of trust and openness between staff and management and among levels of management is essential to the sequence of communication from top management to mid-management to staff and back. The setting of that climate is a function of top management, and above all of the director.

Centralized Communication Responsibility

In a simple item-by-item tally of recommendations made versus those implemented, the libraries which were able to create or re-define a position with central responsibility for internal communication were able to either implement most recommendations or design alternatives to respond to concerns underlying the recommendations.

Nevertheless, defined responsibility for coordinating and managing the flow of communication in one staff position should not be seen as a means by which individual staff and administrators can avoid responsibility for communication. Such a role, however, can emphasize the importance management attaches to communication needs. A major purpose of such a role or position could well be to train staff in communication skills as well as keeping the channels open and working. (The Appendix to this paper contains suggestions for training and increasing staff awareness of communication responsibility.)

The Effect of the Study Itself

In the majority of cases, the study itself was seen as having an effect on staff understanding of the library, and on management's awareness of communication needs in general. All libraries where serious moves toward implementation and continuing evaluation of recommendations had been made reported a sense of improved morale. On the other hand, in one instance where the report was shelved, the result was described as devastating, with staff reluctant to serve on a more recently appointed study team unless assured that their activity and recommendations would be heeded by management.

None of the libraries had a formal mechanism for evaluating staff response, reflecting the same pattern in the recommendations for improving top-down communication while developing relatively few mechanisms for management to receive regular feedback from staff. Several libraries reported that, in management's opinion, the study and report had generated a greater level of awareness of communication processes throughout the library and that this awareness had a Hawthorne Effect* on staff morale. However, in the largest library, University of California/Los Angeles, it was observed that the study in general had raised expectations and that there remained a need to communicate to staff changes in management attitudes as well as what specifically had been done to implement recommendations. Because assessment was not only subjective, but entirely from the point of view of the library administration which had been actively engaged in increased communication activities, the only firm conclusion that can be reached is that management's satisfaction with communication processes had increased.

THE AACR 2 DECISION

The total communication process is closely intertwined with and dependent on the decision-making processes and the organizational structure of the library. The roles which committees and meetings play in decision processes vary with the organization. It is evident, from the heavy emphasis placed on meetings and committees in all of the reports studied, that they are, at least from the staff point of view, central to effective communication as well.

As a means of exploring further the style and methods of communication, particularly as they are expressed in the overall organizational decision process, the seven participating libraries were asked to describe their procedure for making a critical management decision--how to respond to the implementation of AACR 2 on January 1, 1981. Each was asked to describe the process in terms of what body recommended or made the decision; how staff was informed of the issues before, during and after deliberations; how implementation was planned; and what level of staff acceptance and satisfaction with the decision was observable.

The leadership role of top management was immediately obvious in defining the nature of the problem. For example, the charge to the group of broadly-based task forces at the University of Connecticut specified that expediency dictated that the library would conform to national cataloging practices, and that time constraints and technological limitations would require the continuation of the card catalog for at least the next three to five years. Yet another type of assumption was implicit in the composition of study and recommendation groups. On the one hand, Vanderbilt

*The term Hawthorne Effect derives from the 1926 study in Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant, where the attention paid to workers during the study appeared to have more impact on performance than any of the experimental variables which were introduced. See Management and the Worker, by F.J. Rothlisberger and William J. Dickson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939) for a complete description of the experiment.

at the outset declared its present options limited, and treated the issue as a strictly technical services concern. Connecticut, on the other hand, declared "Since cataloging changes will greatly affect all library staff, it is imperative that the task forces have representatives from technical and public services departments...user needs must be the basis for the decisions ...," and the three task forces (AACR 2 Implementation, Card Catalog, and Staff Training) were further charged to meet with interested staff as well as with each other .[7]

In yet a third variation, at Purdue, where most deliberations as of the time of this interview had been part of normal administrative processes rather than committee activity, the pre-existing administrative philosophy that technical services act as support to user sevices encouraged continuous interchange between public and technical services. As a result, public service personnel accepted the need for better bibliographic information for users through the new code, and cataloging staff in turn anticipated making the catalog easier for the patron to use. Attention focused not on AACR 2 as an issue, but on the user need for a university-wide union catalog for the 15-library system.

The ever-present dilemma of the nature of the problem changing even as it is being defined is present in the AACR 2 issue. Two libraries commented that although their committee had made a preliminary recommendation regarding the form of the catalog under the new code, a second — and different -- recommendation was presently in the works. Perhaps more important, every library reported that the immediate, January 1981, decision was seen explicitly as a way-station, an intermediate step in probable progression to a fully automated on-line catalog. Comments centered on new information and changes in network plans announced in the midst of committee deliberations; as one director pointed out, "The choice had to be based mostly on keeping as many options open as possible."

For the most part, communication to staff took the form of education; the actual announcement was, for the most part, a non-event. Again, "They are more interested in why than what!" Information flow throughout the decision process was a major consideration. University of Connecticut's carefully reasoned task force structure included a separate group to deal with staff and user education; in addition, the three task forces were structured to include representatives from all levels of professional staff; further, each was charged to hold at least one open educational meeting. At Temple, the Task Force on the Future of the Card Catalog issued periodic reports to staff, and a major focus was presentation of educational programs to acquaint staff with the expected impact of AACR 2.

Interestingly, although the communication studies and recommendations repeatedly referred to the role of management and supervisors in dissemination of information, and many implementation programs relied heavily on the middle level of unit heads to share information with subordinates, AACR 2 decision processes relied on them relatively little. Committees and task forces for the most part communicated directly with groups of staff, and progress, rationales and decisions were reported directly either by the library administration or by the committee. Where the administrative team served as the decision group as well, little need to deliver an announcement was expressed; in those cases, the entire issue was minimized as being limited in scale and available options.

Regarding staff attitudes and acceptance of the decision, while it is too early in the decision process to have more than subjective opinions, the directors or associates queried had experienced little controversy. Several characteristics mentioned earlier could be expected to have influenced the high level of acceptance. First, and most obvious, is the sharing of understanding of the issue between technical and public services. Education and/or bilateral committees were emphasized, and irrevocable decisions minimized, leading to a reduction of apparent risk. Second, the broadly-based and participative nature of the decision process in most instances could be expected to enhance staff respect for the professional authority and expertise--as opposed to a purely "management" decision--which legitimized the choice of alternatives. Third, the success of the committee process apparently encouraged further use of the same process, as evidenced by the emphasis on continuing committees to evaluate and monitor application of the new code.

CONCLUSIONS

> "Thus, the cause which results in a favorable effect or opinion is not necessarily an action, but rather the knowledge, real or imagined, of an action...it is quite possible for management to adopt a course of action without bringing about a change in employee opinions... [which are] important for two primary reasons: first, they reflect impact, and second, they forecast behavior."[8]

The purpose of organizational communication, ultimately, is to affect behavior, whether of employees, of customers, or of library patrons. The communication of management decisions and actions is what results in reaction, closing the last link of the feedback loop, by implementing change, and providing information for adjustment of the decision.

As we have seen, recommendations from staff groups for improved communication focused on systematic, accurate, timely job information, necessary for reliable performance; on motivational factors which lent perceived legitimacy to decision processes and to those who made the decisions; on personnel concerns; and on developing the skills and accountability which would enable effective participation in decision processes. Management, in the preponderance of cases, responded to the overriding concerns, rather than to treating symptoms. In the case of at least one major management decision -- AACR 2 -- systematic attention to the processes for both decision-making and information resulted in relatively little conflict and a high level of acceptance of the chosen alternative.

Organizational change was on the one hand, the major force motivating systematic internal communication processes; on the other hand, reliable communication and decision systems provided the basis for managing change. The clearly defined expectations of management provided the leadership basis for lateral communication between public and technical service units, as well as establishing a central responsiblity for communication of plans and decisions within the framework of the specific issues of AACR 2. In these respects, the model of planning, decision-making, and communication utilized for AACR 2 is a microcosm of the total organizational communication system recommended by the majority of the internal communication task forces.

FOOTNOTES

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ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES 1527 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 • (202) 232-8656

APPENDIX

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY SETTING

This section offers library managers ideas and guidelines for building and maintaining an effective internal communication system. Many other possibilities for action exist: the interested manager can find further guidance in business and library literature, university training programs, library association programs, and among their own staff. Behind the following discussions and suggestions are several basic themes:

There can be improvement through creative use of available resources.

Training in basic communication, problem-solving and decision-making is an essential first step.

As libraries change or grow, the need to attend to human relations increases.

While sound communication practices are the responsibility of all staff, it is the top administrators who are responsible for setting a climate and providing a leadership role for other managers and supervisors.

Administrators also are responsible for the design and operation of managerial systems and procedures which provide the basis for effective organizational communication. To the degree that such systems as budgeting, planning, and performance appraisal are sound, communication will occur in a useful and productive manner.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SKILLS

Everyone in a library has the potential to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of communication with colleagues and within the organization as a whole. Skills such as active listening; articulating and clarifying ideas, perspectives, and intentions; working with colleagues and supporting their contributions; and constructively managing differences can be identified and developed. The extent to which each library staff member is able to recognize, learn, and use these skills will affect problem-solving, planning, decision-making, and overall library performance. For those in supervisory or managerial positions, these skills are essential components of effective individual performance.

Options for building individual skills include:

(1) Assess skills in organizational communication. For example the Magazine of Bank Administration Vol. LIV. No. 3. (Bank Administration Institute, 303 S. Northwest Highway, Park Ridge, Ill.) has a self survey on communication habits that examines personal, vertical and horizontal communication practices.

(2) Seek formal and informal training through workshops and seminars, directed reading, courses, or individual counseling by qualified persons. For example, if speaking before staff is difficult to do comfortably, enroll in a public speaking course.

(3) Set up focused group problem-solving assignments that recommend changes related to formal and informal communication needs. Activities can be done as self-studies, committee assignments, or special projects.

(4) Schedule small-group meetings whose format includes two-way communication between management and staff, e.g. panel discussions, forums, films/discussions. A useful guide for leaders and group members is Making Meetings Work by Leland P. Bradford (University Associates, San Diego, 1975).

(5) Assign to supervisory and management staff the specific responsibility for assuring effective communication in their units and including this assignment in job descriptions. Set individual objectives and standards for effective communication. Periodically review communication responsibilities and activities.

(6) Develop a management reporting system that underscores the importance and purpose of communication. For example, unit heads can prepare an internal report to communicate progress during the past quarter, exceptions that affected plans, and goals/plans for next quarter.

(7) Provide regular feedback to individuals on the success of their communication efforts. Such feedback also can pinpoint problems and areas for future development. This can be done formally as part of an individual's performance appraisal and informally on a regular basis in one-to-one discussions.

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

Although difficult to define and influence, the organizational climate is an essential indicator of the effectiveness of internal communication. Within any organization are a variety of behavioral and systematic forces that influence the effectiveness and job satisfaction of staff. To a certain extent, climate results from the ways people behave, their values, and the nature of their interaction with others, as well as from the effectiveness of the library's managerial systems and procedures including its rewards system, decision-making practices and organizational structure. In addition the climate is affected by environmental factors beyond the control of individual librarians. A shared understanding of climate factors can lead to more effective internal communication. As a start, for example, climate indicators include:

- Norms: Acceptable behavior as prescribed by peers, work groups, or the organization. These behavioral norms can facilitate or hinder communication.

- The relative emphasis of the organization on accomplishing tasks vs. satisfying needs of employees.

- The willingness of individuals and groups to experiment with new approaches to ways of accomplishing tasks.

- The quality of staff morale. One indicator is the amount of personal antagonisms and hostilities; another is the degree of commitment to organizational goals and high performance.

- The degree of openness and trust: Are problems identified to be solved, or are they hidden to avoid punishment?

- The amount of cooperation versus inter-departmental competition: Do departments work together for the total organization or do they compete in defense of their local interests?

- The degree to which the organizational structure facilitates coordination and communication.

Ideas for improving the climate include:

(1) Encourage ongoing, positive, non-problem-related communication in situations other than formal meetings, e.g., at staff work sites, during coffee breaks, or at work-related social events.

(2) Encourage staff to communicate with you about work problems, and to view you as a resource person. While they should maintain ownership of these problems, your interest and support can encourage mutual understanding of the situation.

(3) Set up a grievance procedure spelling out the steps an employee may take when there is a problem that cannot be resolved with his or her supervisor. A final appeals committee may be established with both management and staff representatives.

(4) Use group problem-solving techniques. Departmental work groups and management teams can identify the climate factors that serve as obstacles to improving communication and work performance. These groups can brainstorm to develop action plans for improving the situation. In those circumstances where the climate factors involve individuals elsewhere in the organization, quid pro quo contracts can be established. A practical manual for team building is Improving Work Groups by Dave Francis and Don Young (University Associates, San Diego, 1979).

(5) Minimize opportunities for supervisor unfairness or inequitable treatment of staff by developing policies to cover common personnel problems of lateness, unexcused absenses or poor performance; establish methods for regular evaluation of supervisory performance; and use ongoing work groups to surface problems and come up with solutions.

(6) Plan in-house workshops and other training programs to develop skills, to diagnose and influence climate factors. Most universities employ a variety of management, and personnel specialists who could be contacted. Often, existing programs may be tailored to library needs. Outside consultants also are available to work with libraries in improving their communication skills and/or structures.

(7) Periodically ask staff to express their views on communication practices, personnel policies and procedures. This can be done in a general meeting, unit metings or by distributing a confidential written questionnaire. Again, an outside consultant can assist in this process.

(8) Emphasize the role of management. The library administration can work to heighten the sensitivity and awareness of key management staff to the impact of their behavior and leadership style on the performance of subordinates.

(9) Set up a two way communication program in which staff can discuss with library managers what is blocking changes and performance improvement.

(10) Share news of changes as soon as possible, even when all details are not yet known. Explain that this is the case, and that you will give more information when possible.

(11) Identify communication needs and determine which groups need to be formed, how often they must meet and what kinds of information need to be shared with them.

COMMUNICATION AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Every library is concerned about the recruitment, selection, utilization and development of human resources. They attempt to hire the best qualified staff and to provide a work situation where talent is employed constructively and people are given opportunities to contribute and grow. However, people often are rewarded for inappropriate behavior in library organizations, e.g., rumor spreading is encouraged, the "squeaky wheel" gets attention, or poor performance is tolerated. While behavioral science research demonstrates that positive reinforcement is the most powerful single tool for modifying behavior, a majority of supervisors and managers continue to use negative and critical feedback for dealing with staff members.

Clearly, there are measures for recognizing, reinforcing and encouraging good performance, with the salary system being the most obvious. Yet, just as important is the communication among supervisors and subordinates.

Ideas for improving the effectiveness of communication within the operation of the library's rewards system:

(1) Assess the organization's current rewards system by identifying both the positive and negative methods used to recognize behavior. Investigate whether the library rewards the behavior it wants to encourage.

(2) Provide training for supervisors in methods of positive reinforcement and ways to respond to staff members' various motivations. Interpersonal and supervisory communication can be influential tools for shaping performance.

(3) Design the performance appraisal system to serve as a communication program in which the supervisor and employee plan together to improve future performance based on the results of past performance. Let staff know what is expected of them by the mutual setting of performance standards, and the regular monitoring of progress.

(4) Express appreciation for a job done well. Encourage, reassure and give approval to staff.

CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION

Differences occur as a natural and expected part of working relationships among people in an organization. These differences may involve opinions, personal perspectives, facts, judgements or values. Conflict needs to be managed to allow for effective performance, and sound communication is a key factor in that conflict management: the emotional effort and energy released through legitimate conflict can be channeled to produce constructive results. We can describe a person's behavior in a conflict situation as falling roughly into one of five categories.

Competing is assertive and uncooperative--an individual pursues his or her own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode.

Accommodating is unassertive and cooperative--the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects his or her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person. There is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode and it is frequently expressed in subordinate - superior relationships.

Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative--the individual does not immediately pursue his or her own concerns or those of the other person, and does not address the conflict.

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative--the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. The superior in an organizational relationship frequently must initiate this process.

Compromising is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties.

Each of these approaches has value in certain circumstances, but over-reliance on any one can have adverse consequences. Successful management of a conflict requires selecting the best approach for each particular situation.

Ideas for strengthening conflict management include:

(1) Encourage intelligent and constructive disagreement. Quick agreement frequently indicates a limited perspective or an unwillingness to express a dissident point of view. Disagreement can be constructive and useful in raising alternatives and reaching more creative solutions with more acceptable results. One method to encourage airing of different views is to listen actively, to find areas of common agreement, and then to specify where differences exist.

(2) Develop self-awareness of personal approaches to managing conflict through participation in workshops or seminars. One helpful book is Keeping Your Cool Under Fire by Theodora Wells (McGraw-Hill, 1980).

(3) Make specific assignments for managing conflicts and getting units or staff to resolve their differences. This develops accountability on the part of supervisors for communicating responsibly with colleagues and staff.

(4) Provide training for supervisors in methods to address and resolve conflict, including negotiation, diagnosis, and problem-solving skills. Supervisors need to be able to determine the nature of the conflict, hear other points of view and use problem-solving processes to bring about consensus.

(5) Stress that all staff can accept responsibility for dealing with conflict constructively, once they have learned skills in this area. This is best done by individuals in supervisory or administrative positions as part of their feedback to staff.

(6) Promote cooperation among individuals and work units rather than independent efforts. In working to integrate individual differences among staff, supervisors must take into account the special capabilities, limitations and characteristics of each person.

COMMUNICATION AND MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

An organization needs to work toward developing and communicating a management philosophy that is shared by those in leadership and supervisory positions. A manager's notions of why people work and what is most effective for encouraging them to work harder to achieve library goals is central to leadership style, work assignments and the nature of information flow. For example, if a manager believes that people are incompetent, lazy, avoid work, and are generally irresponsible, the management approach argues for directive leadership, a tightly structured hierarchical organization, carefully defined personnel policies, and communication patterns that emphasize a flow of information from the top downward.

If, on the other hand, a leader believes that staff inherently want to do a good job, are committed to library goals, and have the talent or potential to contribute to the organization, then the management approach argues for a more consultative/participative style of leadership, a more flexible organizational structure, a personnel policy emphasizing development and growth, and a communication pattern that is open, uses both informal and formal methods, and encourages information to flow upwards as well as downwards and across levels of the organization.

Obviously, libraries are staffed by a variety of individuals whose values, philosophies, skills, and abilities differ. This requires a situational assessment by the chief executive officer who has the most potential for influencing the philosophy of others in the organization.

Ideas for exploring management philosophy include:

(1) Increase formal and informal opportunities for upward communication in the organization by forming mechanisms for issues to be raised and discussed, by modelling openness to divergent points of view, and by expressly recognizing the ambiguity inherent in many organizational decisions.

(2) Once managers have assessed their individual management philosophies, an effort should be made to communicate that philosophy to all members of the library staff. This shared philosophy of management should be clearly understood and accepted by the other managers and supervisors.

(3) In group situations, discuss such questions as: Where are the communication problems coming from? What are the causes of these problems? What can individuals do to improve the situation? How can staff work together to improve overall communication? What changes can be made in systems and procedures?

(4) Increase self-awareness. Managers can examine their own values, experience, motivations, assumptions and behavior. Personal inventories are available commercially, and there are a variety of training programs that focus on developing self-awareness. (e.g. Styles of Management Inventory from Teleometrics Int., 2203 Timberloch Place, Suite 104, The Woodlands, Texas 77380). Study the implications of personal philosophy on interpersonal and organization communication.

The process of improving organizational communication should be a planned effort that involves those who will be affected. Such planning could consist of a series of phases: identifying problems and diagnosing their causes; setting realistic and obtainable goals for improvement; developing alternative solutions, evaluating and testing these and choosing a course of action; defining roles and responsibilities for staff in the implementation of an action plan; providing skills training as required; implementing the action plan; and assessing its effectiveness and making necessary adjustments.

This process itself can be a major step toward improving communication because it calls for involvement of staff; increased interaction among individuals; opportunities for group problem-solving, conflict management, and decision-making; and a focused effort at organizational improvement.